

When Zionism Invaded Africa: The Story of General Idi Amin and Israel's Influence in Uganda

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Israel's government and their Zionist ideology has been present in African politics since the late 1800s. It all began with the British government who wanted to dominate East Africa to advance their commercial interests and to secure trading routes to India before other Western Imperial powers such as Germany and France. In 1888, the British established the Imperial British East Africa Company (IBEAC). This is where the British government had a problem and an idea to solve it and proposed several places that could become a new homeland for the Jewish minority in Europe.

Theodore Herzl's Search for a Jewish Homeland in Africa?

In 1897, the [Zionist Organization](#) (ZO) was founded by **Theodor Herzl**, an Austro-Hungarian citizen with Jewish roots was an accomplished journalist and a political activist who is considered the father of Zionism. Herzl established the Zionist Organization to promote Jewish immigration to Palestine with the idea that it will eventually become a Jewish state, so he saw it as a practical solution against antisemitism throughout Europe. In Herzl's ['A Jewish State: An Attempt at a Modern Solution of the Jewish Question'](#) he said that

“The Argentine Republic would derive considerable profit from the cession of a portion of its territory to us. The present infiltration of Jews has certainly produced some friction, and it would be necessary to enlighten the Republic on the intrinsic difference of our new movement.”

But he made it clear that

“Palestine is our ever-memorable historic home. The very name ‘ of Palestine would attract our people with a force of Marvelous I potency.”

Herzl proclaimed that

“We should there form a portion of the rampart of Europe against Asia, an outpost of civilization as opposed to barbarism. The sanctuaries of Christendom would be safeguarded by assigning them an extra-territorial status, such as is well known to the law of nations. We should form a guard of honor about these_ sanctuaries, answering for the fulfilment of this duty with our existence. This guard of honor would be the great symbol of the solution of the Jewish Question after eighteen centuries of Jewish suffering.”

Herzl spoke of how institutions would assure Jewish Supremacy under the protection of international law:

Externally, the Society will attempt, as I explained before in the general part, to be acknowledged as a State- forming power. The free assent of many Jews will confer on it the requisite authority in its relations with Governments. Internally, that is to say, in its relations with the Jewish people, the Society will create all the first indispensable institutions; it ‘ will be the nucleus out of which the public organizations of the Jewish State will later on be developed. **Our first object is, as I said before, supremacy, assured to us by international law, over a portion of the globe sufficiently large to satisfy our just requirements**

Jewish Zionists in Europe led by Herzl already had a strong connection towards the *Land of Israel* as they saw themselves as the lineage of the ancient people of Israel who settled in Canaan (aka Palestine) more than 2000 years ago which was during the time of the Roman Empire.

Despite the claims that there was a Jewish connection to Palestine, **the British Imperial government did propose more than one territory including Cyprus, El Arish in the North Sinai Peninsula of Egypt and even another place in Africa called the Guas Ngishu, a huge plateau located between Nairobi and Mau which is known today as Kenya and of course, Uganda which was proposed later**, but the crisis for Jews living in Eastern Europe called for decisive action from the British government.

Theodor Herzl spoke at the *Sixth Zionist Congress* in August 1903 and mentioned the British proposal for a temporary place, but there was a sense of urgency for a Jewish homeland since Jews in Russia were facing a high-level of discrimination although Herzl had envisioned Palestine as a future homeland for the Jewish people. Herzl even wrote a novel based on the Jewish “return to Palestine” called ‘*Altneuland*.’

There were several important figures for establishing a Jewish homeland including **Joseph Chamberlain**, a statesman who had experience in managing colonies for the British empire as *Secretary of State for the Colonies* personally knew Theodor Herzl as both were introduced to each other by Rothschild family members.

However, Herzl’s proposal for Jewish settlements in Cyprus, the Sinai Peninsula, or El Arish were not feasible to Chamberlain since they were not under British rule and in some cases, people had been living in these areas for a long time, but he did agree to discuss El-Arish

Plan with Britain's foreign secretary, Lord Lansdowne to gain Jewish support for Britain. So, Chamberlain decided to tour South Africa, during his trip, he passed through Mombasa, a city in southeastern Kenya and was confronted by white British settlers who complained about the lack of workers to finish a railway. **Along the way on a Ugandan railway, he saw a possible Jewish homeland in East Africa (Kenya) since it had a significant number of whites, so he mentioned the possibility to Herzl but did not push the idea any further since the plan was to eventually occupy Palestine.**

But after the Kishnev Pogrom, an anti-Jewish riot that took place in Kishinev, the capital of the Bessarabia Governorate in the Russian Empire in 1903, Herzl thought about East Africa as an option. The British government was interested in establishing a Jewish homeland in East Africa under its control. Reactions were mixed in the Sixth Zionist Congress so there was a split with 295 votes in favor and 178 against the East Africa proposal.

By December 1904, the Zionist Organization sent a special commission to Guas Ngishu to investigate and determine if the conditions were favorable for a Jewish homeland, but the Plan was ultimately rejected in 1905 because of the opposition by a former high commissioner of East Africa and the white settlers. In ['African Zion: The Attempt to Establish a Jewish Colony in the East Africa Protectorate'](#) describes why the plan was rejected:

On the whole, however, there was little for the scheme in British government circles, especially when opposition was encountered. **The white settlers in East Africa, led by Lord Delamere who had obtained a hundred thousand acres on lease, expressed their violent opposition in a campaign of vilification of Jews in general, and of the would-be Jewish settlers in particular.** Eliot, the commissioner of the protectorate, went along with the plan at first, but turned against it as opposition developed. The Indians were unfriendly, and the natives were not consulted



It seemed like the white settlers were acting just like the Palestinians. The rejection of the plan allowed for the establishment of the *Jewish Territorial Organization* (ITO) to find a Jewish homeland even if it means that Palestine is out of the picture. By 1925, the ITO was disbanded with most of its members throwing their support behind the Zionist movement.

Unfortunately, the British and shortly after, the Americans agreed on Palestine becoming a Jewish homeland called Israel in 1948. From there, Israel became a global player along with its Western partners, for example getting involved in Africa's economy and having influence in its politics and that's where the East African nation of Uganda comes in.

The Israelis in Uganda

It all began with a six-foot, four inches tall man by the name of **Idi Amin Dada Oumee**, known as **General Idi Amin**, an erratic dictator who lived like a ruling king who had several wives and children. During the start of his military career in the British led Ugandan military, he was promoted from a private to becoming one of two only black African officers. Serving in British led Uganda military, Amin fought against the Kenya Land and Freedom Army known as the Mau Mau who resisted British colonial rule.

Idi Amin first enlisted in the *British King's African Rifles* (KAR) in 1946 and became an assistant cook since he lacked a formal education but received a comprehensive military training over the years and rose in the ranks, by 1959, he became the highest ranking black African officer (Effendi class 2) in the British led army.

As a private, he was an impressive athlete who played in various sports including Rugby, swimming, and boxing. But it was boxing that made Amin stand out. As an amateur fighter, Amin had won the Uganda light heavyweight boxing championship in 1951 and remained a champion for nine more years. Some say that one of the greatest heavyweight champions of all-time, Muhammad Ali had refused to fight Idi Amin.

By 1962, Uganda gained its independence from British rule under a politician by the name of Milton Obote who became the country's prime minister under King (Kabaka) Mutesa II in a coalition with the Kabaka Yekka movement.

By 1964, Obote had issues with King Mutesa II over a scandal in the *1964 Ugandan lost counties referendum* and was also accused of smuggling gold, so Obote led a coup ousting Mutesa. Obote became a civilian dictator which led him to the presidency in April 1966.

During Obote's presidency, Amin had military training in the U.K and Israel. Amin was promoted several times eventually becoming the commander of all the Ugandan armed forces by 1970.

During that time, Obote had published *'The Common Man's Charter'* which was a guideline leading to socialist policies. By 1970, the Obote government demanded more than 60% of share from private businesses and banks leading to massive corruption scandals. Soon after, food shortages and inflation affected average Ugandans. Obote also persecuted the Indian population and their businesses which did not help the Uganda's economy. In other words, Obote was a corrupt socialist dictator that made life difficult for the Ugandan people.

During Obote's reign, the Israeli government was entrenched in Ugandan society. Israel even sent weapons through Uganda into southern Sudan, to support the Anyanya who were fighting the Arab-dominated Sudanese government for decades. They trained the police and military and supported the Anyanya, a Sudanese separatist group based in the South Sudan since the first Sudanese Civil War began in 1955. The Anyanya were conducting a guerilla war with the Sudanese government. Obote made a fatal decision to withdraw support for the Anyanya rebels which infuriated the Israelis since they were instrumental in fighting an Arab-influenced Sudanese government on the African continent.

However, during a short period of time, Obote managed to disappoint Western powers including the U.S., U.K., and of course, Israel. [*Foreign Relations of the United States, 1969-1976, Documents on Sub-Saharan Africa, 1969-1972*](#) stated that "Amin is regarded as more moderate and pro-Western than Obote but his ability to organize and run an effective government is questionable." So clearly, they knew Idi Amin would be more manageable than Obote who had socialist policies that would naturally lead to friendly relations with the Soviet Union, Cuba, and North Korea. Idi Amin was the safer bet for Washington, London and Tel Aviv.

The West and Israel Supported Adi Amin's Coup Against Obote

By January 1971, Idi Amin and his army overthrew President Obote with help from the

Israelis and the CIA although Obote was in Singapore attending a Commonwealth conference. In 1976, [The New York Times interviewed a retired Israeli colonel](#) who helped Idi Amin topple Obote in 1971, *“Colonel Bar-Lev was head of the Israeli mission to Kampala shortly after General Amin became chief of staff of armed forces. The Israeli became his confidant, and their families became close friends.”* Bar-Lev supported General Amin because Obote was ready to expel the Israelis, *“The colonel, In an Interview today, said he supported General Amin against President Milton Obote because the latter was hostile to Israel and was planning to expel Israeli forces from his country.”*

Amin avoided a coup when his paratroopers killed Obote’s military officers who were planning to arrest him:

Colonel Bar-Lev advised the general to station in Kampala a military force from his own tribe. The force would include paratroopers, armor, and jeeps. Its mobility and firepower would be such that 600 to 800 men could overcome 5,000, he said. Trained by Israelis, this force thwarted an Obote effort to oust General Amin, the colonel said, and played a key role in defeating the President’s forces.

Colonel Bar-Lev said that in January 1971, President Obote, who was attending a conference in Singapore, decided to remove General Amin, and sent orders to have him arrested. A battalion commander loyal to President Obote called a meeting in the officers’ club to make plans for the arrest. Four Uganda paratrooper instructors loyal to General Amin learned of the plan and killed those at the meeting. General Amin then telephoned Colonel Bar-Lev announcing, *“The revolution has started”*

The breaking point between Israel and Uganda was when Tel Aviv decided to cancel a visit by President Amin in late 1971 who was going to attend a ceremony for 200 Ugandan soldiers who completed a training course, so Amin was offended. Shortly after, Amin was interested in visiting Libya *“Then, without mentioning what had happened, he asked “How many kilometers from here to Benghazi? If I can’t go to Israel, I’ll go to Benghazi.”* According to the *New York Times*, The Israeli colonel went back to Israel and Idi Amin became a critic of Israel:

Colonel Bar -Lev returned home and President Amin announced a rupture of relations between the countries and the expulsion of all Israelis. He became one of Israel’s bitterest critics in Africa and provided Arab terrorists with bases and training facilities.

The former colonel said he had never had illusions about President Amin. He said he told officials in Jerusalem years ago that the man was emotionally unstable. He was told he was exaggerating

Israel’s Hand in Uganda’s Politics

Since the 1950’s, Israel wanted strategic partnerships with several African states to counter Arab influenced governments who were seen as hostile to Israel, so Amin was seen as the puppet dictator to help Israel achieve its goals in Africa. As a commander in the Ugandan army, Amin initially had a good relationship with top Israeli politicians and military officials, at one point he even enrolled in a paratrooper course in Israel which he never completed.

In 1972, there was an invasion of Uganda organized by Obote and supported by Tanzania in a mission to overthrow Amin with Ugandan rebels. So, Amin needed arms to counter

Obote's forces, but Israel and the US refused military support because they wanted Amin's government to pay upfront, so naturally, Amin turned to President Muammar Gaddafi of Libya and promptly ended his relationship with Israel and the U.S. Amin went to Libya and met with Gaddafi. Soon after, Amin denounced Zionism and received a \$25 million loan and received other loans from the *Libyan-Ugandan Development Bank*. Then Amin started to remove Israeli military advisers and technicians, and then ended full diplomatic relations with Israel.

Besides Amin's policies towards Indians which was no different from Obote's policies by shutting down their businesses and deporting them, he targeted the Israelis which was a major step for Amin's foreign policies towards the state of Israel.

Amin's new policies towards the Israelis were clear, he had completely changed. But then rumors spread that Amin used national funds for his own personal expenses which may have been true since most Western and Israeli supported dictators were corrupt, but Israel took a chance with Amin anyway, and it eventually backfired.

On August 22, 1972, *The New York Times* published ['Ugandan Expulsion Is a Setback for Israel'](#), on Israel establishing ties with non-Arab states but the big picture was to conduct covert operations to destabilize their Arab neighbors, *"for Israel, Africa is a major diplomatic battleground. Premier Golda Meir has said that since Israel could not be friends with her Arab neighbors, she would try to "be friends with our neighbors' neighbors."*

Israeli influence was gaining some ground in Africa which was successful until President Idi Amin turned on them, maybe he was embarrassed to learn about what the Israelis were up to in the Middle East and in Africa thanks to Muammar Gaddafi, *"for more than a decade the policy was an almost unqualified success. Israel established relations with 32 black states, or most of non-Arab Africa"* and that *"Israeli diplomacy has now suffered a sharp setback in the East African nation of Uganda, which expelled the last of 470 Israeli diplomats, military advisers, technicians and dependents on April 9."*

Israel blamed Libya since it offered Idi Amin the much-needed support but according to the *NY Times*, *"Informed sources said that Uganda owed Israel \$13 million to \$18 million, most of it in the form of short-term debts to Israeli contracting concerns constructing airfields, military barracks, housing projects and buildings, and that Uganda simply did not have the money to pay."*

An observer said that *"When Amin began all this spending, Israeli contractors figured they might as well get their share."* Amin defended his stance against Israeli accusations as he told Soviet journalists *"That Israelis had been "milking Uganda dry" and that "if you ask them to build a fence, they will demand three quarters of the payment in advance."* The *NY Times* suggested that Idi Amin was a dead beat, refusing to repay the Israelis, *"In this view, General Amin's action represents an indirect form of debt repudiation."* They even went as far as to say that Ugandan civilian officials could not control Amin's spending habits, so they conveniently blamed the Israelis:

Another factor was that some Ugandan civilian officials had been critical of the Israelis to General Amin. **Unable to restrain the general's spending themselves, they reportedly took the desperate course of suggesting that it was the Israelis and not Government orders that were causing the financial squeeze**

It's worth mentioning that Idi Amin was an Israeli favorite over Milton Obote who condemned their aggression against Egypt and moved to cut support to the Anyanyas:

Uganda's President at the time, Milton Obote, was a Pan-Africanist who envisioned a united Africa that would challenge the legacy of division and colonialism. Like most African leaders, he condemned Israeli aggression against Egypt and wanted to cut off support to the Anyanyas. But Amin, the Ugandan Army's commander at the time, was a great admirer of Israel. He had briefly enrolled in a paratrooper course there (uncompleted), and was friendly with Colonel Baruch Bar-Lev, Israel's military attaché in Uganda; Amin's numerous wives and children even socialized with Bar-Lev's wife and children. Amin came from an area near the Sudanese border, so was well placed to insure that Israeli arms continued to flow to the Anyanya, against Obote's wishes

Months later, Israel took Uganda to court for the money its President, Idi Amin owed to them. On November 29th, 1972, in a *New York Times* [report](#) 'Israel-Uganda Dispute Reaches into Court Here as Bank's Assets Are Ordered Attached' the Israelis claimed that the Ugandan government owed them \$610,270.20:

An Israeli contracting company obtained in State Supreme Court in Manhattan an order directing sheriffs in the state to attach any assets of Grind lays Bank (Uganda) Ltd. to satisfy the company's claim of \$610,270.20.

Court papers filed for J. Zeevi & Sons, Ltd., which had done construction work in the East African country, said the company had made deposits in Uganda currency in Grindlays Bank last March against which letters of credit totaling \$610,270.20 could be drawn here. The company charged that Grind lays, a British-owned commercial bank, had canceled the letters of credit because of the Uganda Government's "new policy of active anti-Semitism."

Libya was also mentioned in the lawsuit:

General Amin, who visited Israel three times in 1971, later broke with the Israelis, charging that they had encroached on Uganda's military and economic affairs. He is also said to have felt that his status as an African leader was being compromised by his close ties with Israel. Israel believes Libya encouraged the break.

Another factor is reported to be that Uganda owed more than \$13 million in short-term debts to Israeli concerns constructing airfields, military bar racks and housing projects and that Uganda did not have the money to pay the debt

The Israelis said that Amin praised Hitler and that anti-Semitism was at the forefront of Uganda's foreign policy towards Israel:

The Zeevi complaint contended that the cancellation of the letter of credit was "based upon a new Government-inaugurated and directed policy on forfeiture of foreign assets and property and a new policy of active anti-Semitism embarked upon by the Government of Uganda."

Court papers included as exhibits were news articles quoting General Amin as praising Hitler "for the killing of Jews." Both the seizure of foreign assets and the official anti-

Semitism, the complaint said, “are against and repugnant to the public policy of the State of New York and not recognized by the Federal Government of the United States”

In 2016, *The New Yorker* [published](#) an interesting article called ‘*Idi Amin’s Israeli Connection*’ based on Amin’s ties to Israel:

Israel itself helped install Amin in power, creating a monster who turned on his former patrons. Israel had had a special relationship with Uganda since the latter’s independence from Great Britain, in 1962. Beginning in the nineteen-fifties, David Ben-Gurion, then Israel’s Prime Minister, sought strategic partnerships with states on the edge the Arab world, including Uganda, Kenya, Iran, and Turkey, to counter the hostile nations on Israel’s own borders. As part of what became known as the Peripheral Doctrine, Israel trained and equipped Uganda’s military and carried out construction, agriculture, and other development projects.

Just months after the Six-Day War, in 1967, Israel sold Uganda weapons worth seven million dollars. In 1969, Israel began funneling weapons through Uganda into southern Sudan, where a ragtag rebel group known as the Anyanya had been fighting the Arab-dominated Sudanese government since the nineteen-fifties

Idi Amin had expelled the Israelis; however, this does not ignore the fact that the ‘*Butcher of Uganda*’ was a dictator who reportedly ordered the murder of 100’s of thousands of Ugandans for ethnic, political, and financial reasons during his time in power. Amin even purged his military officers and enlisted men from various ethnic groups including the Acholi and Lango people who technically opposed him and supported Obote. That purge resulted in more than 5,000 military members killed and if you include the civilians who were killed in the process, the number is doubled.

In 1978, Amin wated to annex Tanzania’s Kagera region, in response the Tanzanian president Julius Nyerere sent his troops to invade Uganda and occupied Kampala by 1979 and removed Idi Amin from power. Amin went into exile in Libya, Iraq and ended up in Saudi Arabia for the rest of his life.

Idi Amin Dada was not one of the good guys, that’s for sure, but isn’t it ironic that even a dictator who was backed by the West and Israel, finally opened his eyes to the dangers of Zionism, he even called his former bosses ‘criminal’ for what they were doing to the Palestinians.

Here is a video with General Idi Amin in a candid interview explaining how the Israelis turned the Palestinians into refugees in their own country:

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